



Houston Friends of Music
The Shepherd School of Music

Chamber 
Music

Series  

ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

Stude Concert Hall Alice Pratt Brown Hall Rice University

November 15, 1994

8:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Quartet in C Major, K 157
(1756-1791) Allegro moderato
 Andante
 Presto

Béla Bartók Quartet No. 4
(1881-1945) Allegro
 Prestissimo con sordino
 Non troppo lento
 Allegretto pizzicato
 Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132
(1770-1827) Allegro sostenuto - Allegro
 Allegro ma non tanto
 Molto adagio (Heiliger Dankgesang eines
 Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der
 lydischen Tonart)
 Alla marcia: assai vivace
 Allegro appassionato

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PROGRAM NOTES

Quartet in C Major, K. 157 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

In the fall of 1772, Mozart and his father set out for Italy, where, on January 27, 1773, he turned seventeen. In Milan he composed the opera seria *Lucio Silla*, which was performed that January. Sometime before they returned to Salzburg in March, Mozart composed the Quartet in C — as well as four other quartets, five sonatas for violin and piano, a symphony (K. 96), the motet *Exsultate, jubilate*, and other works.

Like several of the early quartets, the Quartet in C contains only three movements, instead of the four that became the norm. While this quartet is not as fully developed as his mature works, and does not suggest the same depth of feeling, it has an engaging freshness and allows for a greater contribution by all four instruments than many early quartets by Haydn and his other contemporaries.

The first movement begins with the violins in close parallel with the lower voices accompanying. Eventually the viola joins the violins in a contrapuntal section leading to the second subject. After the first violin states a two-bar motif, the inner voices take it up, followed by the cello. The development uses material from the closing section of the exposition and the second subject, giving a strong sense of expectation satisfied when the opening theme returns in the recapitulation. The second movement, a song-like *Andante* in C minor, has the feeling of a melody plus accompaniment; but both the melody and the accompaniment are shared by all the voices. The finale is a lively *Presto* in rondo form, characterized by the frequent use of syncopation. A brief coda brings the piece to an end sooner than most listeners would like.

This is the first performance of this quartet on a Friends of Music concert.

Program note by Edward Doughtie

Quartet No. 4 Béla Bartók

To listen to the music of Béla Bartók with the secret hope that the savage rhythms will sooner or later lead to a waltz or that the unresolved dissonances will eventually settle down to a sweet and comfortable tune is to be forever disappointed. For Bartók, perhaps more than any other composer of this era, was uncompromising in his demands on the listener. He did not compose string quartets in the manner of the symmetry and grace of the classical period, or in the personal style of the Romantic period, and from the standpoint of the ear attuned only to the quartets of Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms, listening to Bartók's quartets for the first time

may be a disconcerting experience. The broken rhythms, brutal chords, percussive effects and unrelieved dissonance take on a greater meaning on multiple hearings as the bias of the listener gives way to an understanding of the magnificence of Bartók's instrumental innovations. Later it becomes clear that his expansion of the musical possibilities of the string quartet has redefined both its medium and its message.

The Fourth Quartet, composed in 1928, has most of the above noted stylistic innovations. It is in five movements and built on a symmetrical plan of related first and fifth movements and related second and fourth movements, with the third movement forming an "arch" in the middle. The *Allegro* and *Allegro molto* are full of rapid movement, strong jolting rhythms and orchestral sounds. The *Prestissimo*, muted throughout, rushes by in bumpy wheezes and breath-taking glissandos, while the *Allegretto pizzicato* is equally dazzling and strange with its guitar-like chords, arpeggios, and hard snapping of strings on the fingerboard. The middle movement, *Non troppo lento*, the only slow movement, has at the beginning and end sustained chords which frame a haunting cello rhapsody embellished with "night sounds" reminiscent of birds and other sounds of nature. Judging by the work's internal structure, this movement seems to be the focus of the entire quartet.

This is the third appearance of this quartet on a Friends of Music program; it was last played by the Franciscan Quartet in July, 1986.

Program note by Jack B. Mazow

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132 Ludwig van Beethoven

In the fall of 1822, the Russian Prince Nicholas Galitzin, an amateur cellist and admirer of Beethoven, wrote offering to pay him whatever he thought proper for the composition of one, two, or three quartets. From May 1824 until November 1826, Beethoven worked on the three quartets for the prince, opus 127, 130, and 132, plus two others, opus 131 and 135. These late quartets contain some of Beethoven's most profound musical thinking. They push the boundaries of motivic development farther than anyone had gone before. And to many listeners, they have suggested new depths of spiritual and emotional expressiveness.

Beethoven encouraged such responses by labeling the slow movement of the A-minor quartet a "holy thanksgiving song of a convalescent to the divinity, in the lydian mode." And a section of contrasting material

in this same movement is marked "feeling new strength." Beethoven had indeed been ill during the winter of 1822-23, and composed the quartet in the spring. The late nineteenth-century critic A. B. Marx invented a whole program for the quartet based on Beethoven's illness and recovery; for instance, he found the second movement to be a description of the recovering composer walking in the countryside and watching the peasants dance. While just such an experience may be behind the composition of the work, there is no evidence for a detailed program, or even of a general one, like that of the Sixth Symphony. Of course any listener may find passages expressive of restlessness, pain, melancholy, joy, or, in the slow movement, thankfulness and "feeling new strength." But what we sense as spiritual depth is an inference we make from the intensity and profundity of the purely musical material. In 1824 Beethoven wrote the publisher Peters that this quartet "is one of the best works I have ever produced." Many listeners have agreed.

The quartet is built out of contrasts. The first few bars, which provide the motivic material for most of the first movement, contain several: the slow opening *Assai sostenuto* begins with a motif that is repeated and inverted in the other voices until the violin abruptly breaks into a run that announces the *Allegro*. The cello then introduces the dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note motif that becomes the first subject. Legato passages clash with short quarter-note chords and other contrasting material until the second subject, a lyrical tune in F, appears in the second violin over restless triplets in the viola and cello. The development section seems shorter than one might expect, and what appears to be the recapitulation is in E minor instead of the expected A minor. But then there is a second recapitulation, this time in the normal keys of A minor and C. Extreme dynamic contrasts are evident throughout, especially near the end of the movement.

The second movement, marked *Allegro ma non tanto*, is in a dance-like triple time, and in contrast to the emotional first movement, as Joseph Kerman says, is "low-keyed, abstract, level, cool." Again there are internal contrasts: the opening unison passage yields to contrapuntal material in which the motifs are broken into smaller and smaller units and played with exhaustively. The middle section offers mental relief with a bagpipe-like tune over a drone; the viola introduces a busy eighth-note line which the violin takes up, until gruff unisons in the lower voices and an unexpected shift in meter bring back the drone. The first section is then repeated exactly.

The *Molto adagio*, the "Heiliger Dankgesang," employs the "lydian mode," a scale based on F without the B flat, a Romantic gesture that reflects a revival of interest in early church music. In contrast to the slow, serene counterpoint of the opening, the section marked "Neue Kraft fühlend" is an *Andante* in three-eight time, in D major, and moves with more energy. The *adagio* and *andante* sections then repeat with

variations until the *adagio* returns in a final variation marked "Mit innigster Empfindung" (with the most intimate feeling).

A jaunty little march — contrast again — is interrupted by a surprising recitative, an operatic gesture that may remind one of the recitatives that lead to the finale of the Ninth Symphony. A run in the first violin, rather like those in the first movement, leads to the finale, the *Allegro appassionato*. The feeling of this movement is similar to the restless agitation of the first movement, until the *Presto* coda, introduced by the cello crying out the main theme at the top of its range, moves into A major and ends the work with a burst of positive energy.

This is the sixth appearance of this quartet on a Friends of Music program; it was last played by the Emerson Quartet in January, 1984.

Program notes by Edward Doughtie

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Formed in Toronto in 1989, the St. Lawrence Quartet soon leaped into prominence by winning the Banff International String Quartet Competition and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1992. The quartet has since performed at many American colleges and universities, and in New York, Paris, Montevideo, the Gardner Museum in Boston, and in Washington at the Corcoran Gallery, the Kennedy Center, and the White House.

The quartet has completed a two-year residency with the Emerson Quartet at the Hartt School of Music of the University of Hartford in Connecticut, and is now the Julliard School's Graduate String Quartet-in-Residence, where they serve as teaching assistants to the members of the Julliard String Quartet. They have performed with the Emerson String Quartet, the Tokyo String Quartet, pianist Ruth Laredo, and other distinguished artists.

Although violinist Geoff Nuttall was born in Texas, he and the other members of the quartet have either lived or studied in Canada. Nuttall and violinist Barry Shiffman both studied at the University of Toronto, while cellist Marina Hoover and violist Lesley Robertson both have degrees from the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. All have studied at other institutions such as Yale, Julliard, the Banff Center, and the Universities of British Columbia and Western Ontario. The members of the quartet have also performed as soloists and earned numerous prizes and grants.

Geoff Nuttall plays a violin by Josef Guarnerius filius Andrea made in 1710. Barry Shiffman's violin is by Antonio Stradivarius made in 1716 at Cremona. The instrument Marina Hoover plays is a William Forester cello made in England in 1845 and is on loan from the Banff Center. Lesley Robertson's viola is by Gio. Balta Morassi of Cremona made in 1973.